

The Two Harriets: Heroines of Abolition

By ReadWorks



Harriet Beecher Stowe



Harriet Tubman

Many people fought against slavery in the United States. They were called abolitionists because they wanted to abolish (get rid of) slavery. Two of the best-known abolitionists were both named Harriet: Harriet Beecher Stowe and Harriet Tubman.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was the sixth of 11 children born to a minister and his wife. She was just five years old when her mother died. At age 13, she started going to a school founded by her sister, where she learned to be a teacher and started writing. She wrote her first book at age 22.

In 1852, her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published. It quickly became a bestseller. Indeed, it was the most popular book in America. Although the book was fiction, it was based on the lives of real people. The novel tells the story of several slaves, but its main character is Tom, a man with a wife and children. Tom is separated from his family and sold to one plantation owner after another. The last of his owners is a cruel man named Simon Legree. Legree orders Tom to beat the other slaves on his plantation. Tom refuses, so Legree beats Tom. Legree orders his hired hands, called overseers, to kill Tom. While Tom dies, several of the other characters in the book escape from slavery by traveling north to Canada via what was called the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, but a network of people who helped shelter and guide slaves to their freedom.

Stowe's novel moved many readers and inspired them to speak out against slavery. Many plays were performed based on the novel's characters. But her book angered people in the South, and historians believe it helped lead the Southern states to break away from the North a decade later, which marked the beginning of the Civil War. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so influential that when President Abraham Lincoln met Stowe in 1862, he is supposed to have said: "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war."

Like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman was one of 11 children. Both of Harriet Tubman's parents were slaves on a plantation in Maryland. Tubman began working at six years old, rented out by her "master" as a weaver. As a teenager, she began working in the fields of the plantation. She suffered many beatings at the hands of the plantation's overseers, which caused permanent damage. Learning that the plantation owner planned to sell her and her brothers, she decided to escape. Guided only by the North Star in the sky, she made her way to Pennsylvania, frequently on foot.

But Tubman was not content simply to live in freedom. She became active in the Underground Railroad Harriet Beecher Stowe had written about.

Just one year after her own escape, she returned to the South to rescue her sister and her sister's two children. Then she returned once again for one of her brothers. Sometime later, she returned yet again to rescue her parents. It was not just her family she helped to become free. She wanted to help other slaves to escape. She returned to the South 19 times. The exact number of slaves that Tubman led to freedom is unknown; a 19th century biography stated that she rescued 300 slaves, while modern historians estimate the total was closer to 70.

During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a nurse and a cook. She also became a spy. In one daring mission, she learned the position of the Confederate Army along the Combahee River in South Carolina and traveled on a gunboat with hundreds of Union Army soldiers as they freed about 750 slaves.

Both Harriets lived fruitful lives long past the Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe continued to write, publishing more than 30 books. In her 80s, Harriet Tubman opened a nursing home in her adopted hometown of Auburn, NY for older African Americans. Both spoke out for women's rights. But Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe are now recognized for their different but important roles in ending slavery in the United States of America.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is an abolitionist?

- A someone who was in favor of slavery
- B someone who was well-educated
- C someone who wanted to get rid of slavery
- D someone who has escaped from slavery

2. How does the author compare Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe?

- A They were both abolitionists.
- B They were both African Americans.
- C They were both famous authors.
- D They both worked for the Union Army.

3. Harriet Tubman's work to improve the lives of African Americans continued after the Civil War. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A "But Tubman was not content simply to live in freedom. She became active in the Underground Railroad Harriet Beecher Stowe had written about."
- B "In her 80s, Harriet Tubman opened a nursing home in her adopted hometown of Auburn, NY for older African Americans."
- C "Just one year after her own escape, she returned to the South to rescue her sister and her sister's two children. Then she returned once again for one of her brothers."
- D "During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a nurse and a cook. She also became a spy."

4. Read the following sentences: "[Harriet Tubman] also became a spy. In one daring mission, she learned the position of the Confederate Army along the Combahee River in South Carolina and traveled on a gunboat with hundreds of Union Army soldiers as they freed about 750 slaves." Based on this information, what can you conclude about Harriet Tubman?

- A She was kind.
- B She was generous.
- C She was modest.
- D She was brave.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A two women named Harriet and their roles in helping to end slavery
- B two women named Harriet and their lives during the Civil War
- C how Harriet Beecher Stowe's book helped start the Civil War
- D how Harriet Tubman led slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad

6. Read the following sentences: "But her book angered people in the South, and historians believe it helped lead the Southern states to break away from the North a decade later, which marked the beginning of the Civil War. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so **influential** that when President Abraham Lincoln met Stowe in 1862, he is supposed to have said: 'So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.'"

As used in this sentence, what does the word "**influential**" mean?

- A not having a say in something
- B uninteresting, boring, or unengaging
- C having power to cause change
- D scared or hesitant to do something

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe had many things in common; _____, they were both abolitionists, they both fought for women's rights, and they were both one of eleven children.

- A however
- B specifically
- C meanwhile
- D consequently

8. Approximately how many slaves did Harriet Tubman help escape to freedom?

9. How was Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influential in the period leading up to the Civil War?

10. "But Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe are now recognized for their different but important roles in ending slavery in the United States of America." Explain how each of the Harriets helped to end slavery. Support your answer using information from the passage.
